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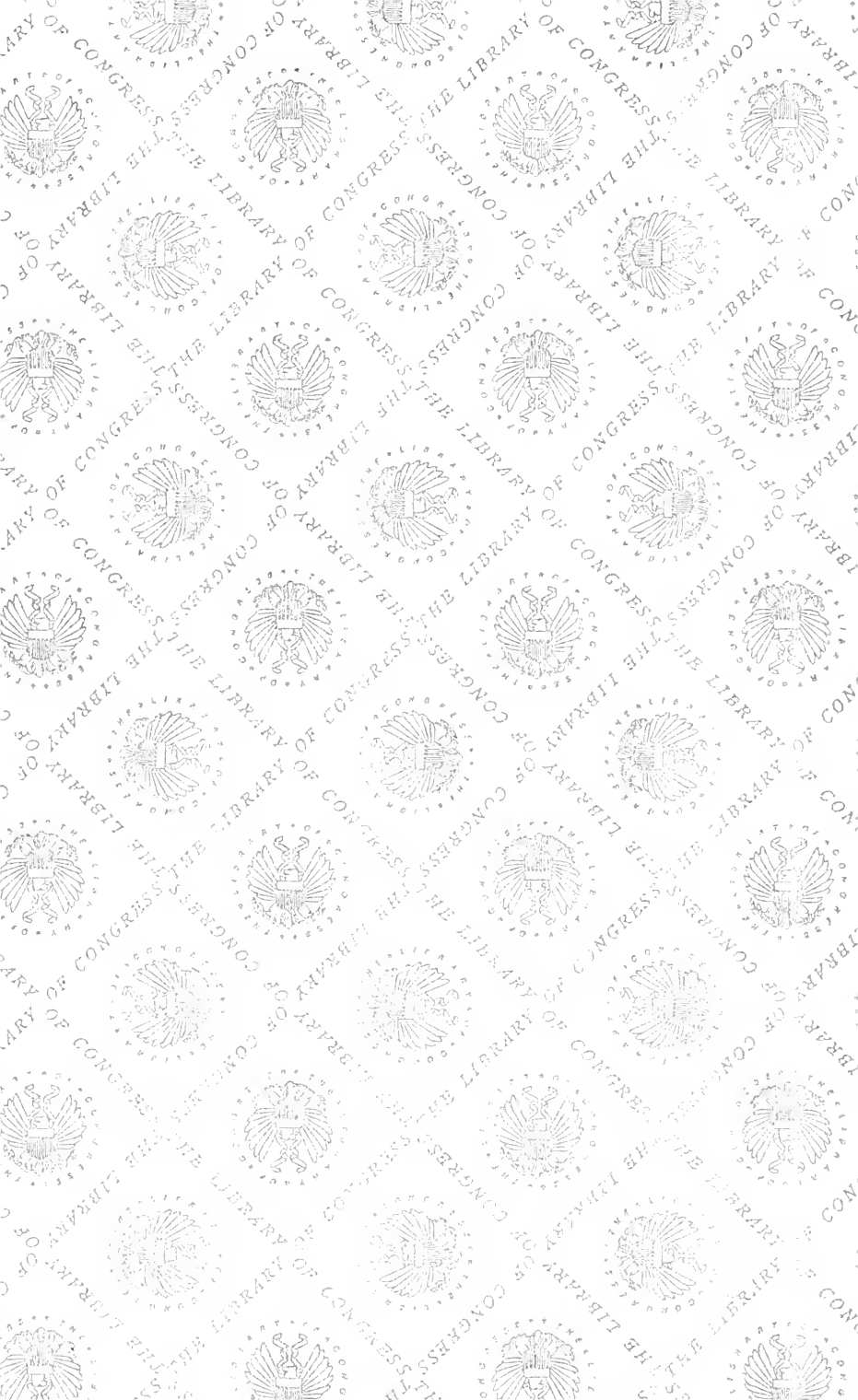
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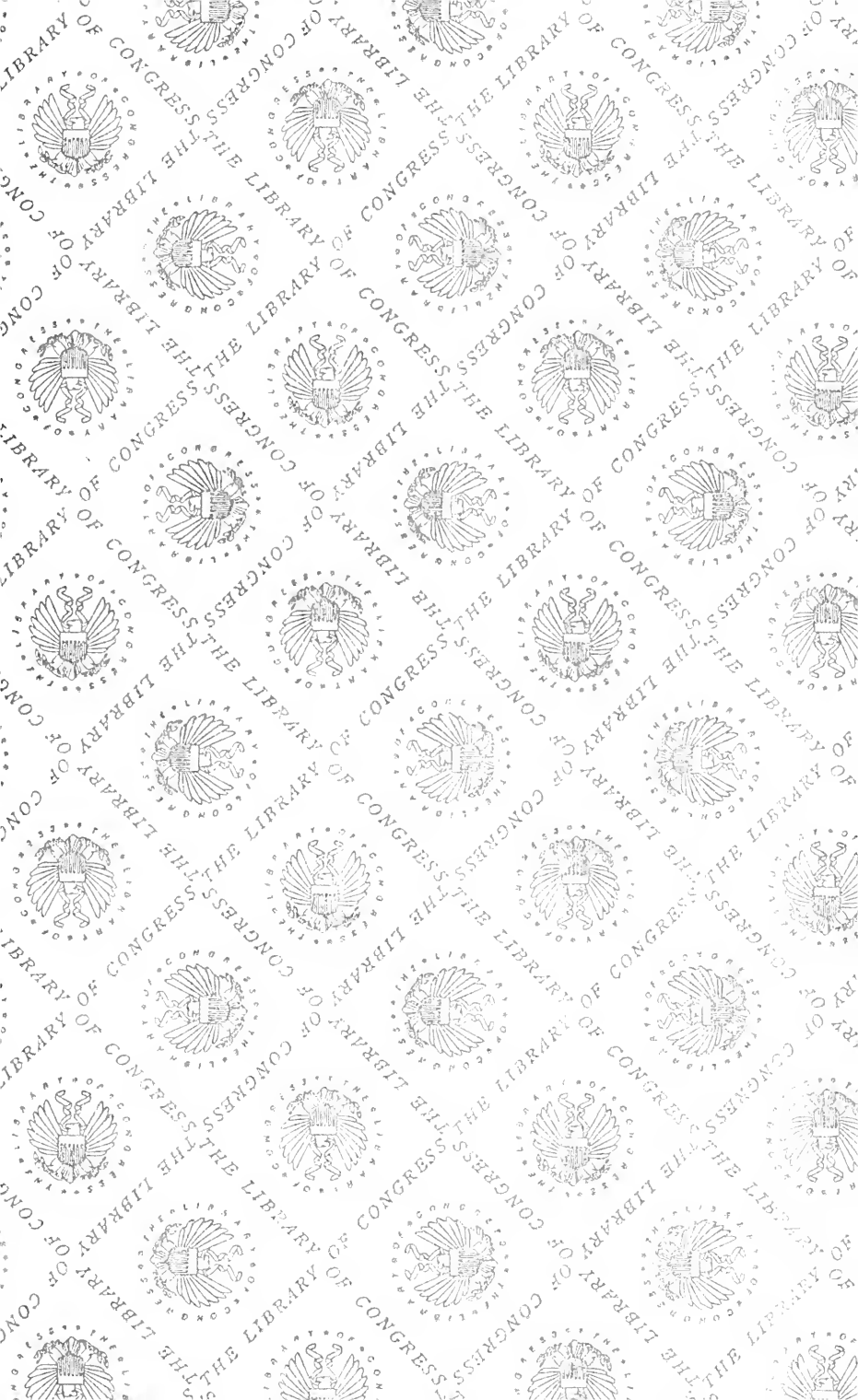
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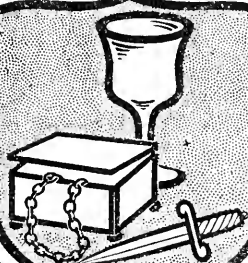






“OF A SURETY I
HAVE NOW SET MY
FEET ON THAT
POINT OF LIFE, BE-
YOND THE WHICH
HE MUST NOT PASS
WHO WOULD RE-
TURN.”

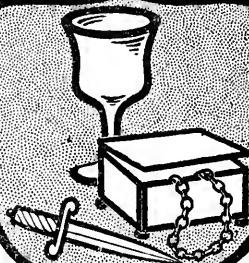
LA VITA NUOVA.



THE POINT OF
LIFE ❁ A PLAY
IN THREE ACTS
BY AMELIA J.
BURR ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁







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1907

THE POINT OF LIFE, A PLAY IN THREE
ACTS BY AMELIA J. BURR    

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY.

BENVENUTO CELLINI.

CECCHINO, his brother.

LIPERATA, their younger sister.

DOMIZIO, a Florentine merchant.

LUCIANA, his wife.

GIULIA, her sister.

MONNA GUICCIARDA.

MONNA ANDREA.

NANDO, Benvenuto's apprentice.

COSINO, his errand-boy.

FAVILLA.

PETRONILLA.

GAIETTA.

BEPPUCCIO.

LEONE.

FIRST ACT. — Benvenuto's work-room.

Morning.

SECOND ACT. — Liperata's house.

Night.

THIRD ACT. — Benvenuto's upper-room.

The following day. Late afternoon.

FLORENCE — 1529.

THE POINT OF LIFE.

FIRST ACT — Morning.

Benvenuto's work-room. It occupies about two thirds of the stage, the other third being the street. A door and a wide low window open on the street. Beside the window is a bench at which NANDO sits working. COSINO, a slim, pretty, impish boy, hovers over him, admiring and criticising by turns. In the centre of the room, at the back, are two or three steps leading up to a door that stands ajar. On the landing is a tray with bread, wine and fruit. Across the street from Benvenuto's door is Domizio's house, also with a large window beside the door. *COSINO leaves his observation, steals up the steps and listens at the door at the back. NANDO suspends his work and looks up, questioning. COSINO shakes his head with a shrug, takes a fruit from the tray, and comes back eating it.*

COSINO, his mouth full.

Pity to waste it when it is so good.

When he is in a working mood like this
he would not know it from a four-day's crust.

NANDO.

I never saw him so absorbed before
that he could live on work alone.

COSINO, *derisively*.

Oho!

You never saw him do such work before.

NANDO.

What is it he is making?

COSINO.

I'll not tell.

NANDO.

I do not choose to peep through keyholes, — I!

COSINO, *indignantly*.

'T was not the keyhole! See, the door's ajar.

NANDO, *coaxing*.

What is he making?

COSINO.

Something beautiful.

NANDO.

For whom is it?

COSINO.

Somebody beautiful.

NANDO.

What, not Favilla?

COSINO, *with concentrated scorn.*

'T is of gold, not brass.

After an expectant pause.

Are you so soon discouraged? Try again.

NANDO, *with an expressive grimace.*

Oh, if it is a trinket for a woman — !

COSINO.

But if it were a trinket for THE woman?

NANDO.

The woman, — is there such, — for Benvenuto?

Out on you, imp! What does a child your age know of such difference 'twixt "a" and "the"?

COSINO.

A child my age, little enough, perhaps,
but Benvenuto's servant, — everything!

*With a flourishing bow, he goes out, but returns
and pops his head in at the window to say*

Think you that Monna Luciana there

fills both my hands with sweetmeats every day
for my sake, or for his? Hist, — here she comes.

Were I her handsome, clumsy husband there,

I would not go away.

*He perches himself on the window sill as LUCIANA
and DOMIZIO come out of their house opposite,
pausing at the door. He is dressed for a journey.*

NANDO.

What do you mean?

Our master is an honest gentleman
beyond the wont of Florence; and beside,
see how she hangs upon her husband's words
as if he were the angel Gabriel.

COSINO.

The angel Gabriel, — hm! yes, — perhaps.

LUCIANA.

Four days at most, remember!

DOMIZIO.

Why, dear heart,

I said a week at least.

LUCIANA.

I cannot see

why you must go at all.

DOMIZIO.

It is such journeys
that clothe this daintiness in costly silk
and hang fair jewels on this broad white brow.

LUCIANA.

I rather would be folded in your arms
than in the richest silk, and on my brow
your kiss is all the jewel that I need.

DOMIZIO.

Yet in the matter of the pretty gauds
you hold so lightly, now I recollect
that you did not disdain the gem I brought

from my last journey, — that large topaz, deep
and lucent as your eyes.

LUCIANA.

When did I ever
d disdain a gift of yours?

DOMIZIO.

Who makes the setting?

LUCIANA.

I gave it to young Benvenuto there
across the way; you bade me give it him.

DOMIZIO.

Florence has not his peer for taste and skill.

LUCIANA.

And he so young and wild! He promised me
it should be done to-day.

DOMIZIO.

Would I might stay
to see your beauty shame the gem, — but now,
I have already lingered here too long:
the sooner gone, the sooner come again.

LUCIANA.

I never was so loth to have you go.

DOMIZIO.

Why, you did not so fondly cling to me
when first I left you, — nor in truth did I
so long to stay.

LUCIANA.

To such a love as ours
the blush of every morning ushers in
another and a sweeter wedding-day
DOMIZIO.

You shiver, sweetheart; what, are you not well?
Your hands are cold.

LUCIANA.

The morning air is fresh.

DOMIZIO.

And thoughtless I to keep you standing here!
But if I go not with one sudden wrench
I shall not go at all. Farewell, dear love, —
God keep you safe! — Stay, I forgot the gold
for Benvenuto; pay him all he asks.
This trinket is a wedding-gift to you
for to-day's bridal, and I will not stint.
Again, — and so farewell.

*He embraces her and goes. As he disappears
she stands watching him and waving her hand.
All at once her head falls back against the door-
casing and the purse falls at her feet. ✠ COSINO
darts across and picks it up for her as she
recovers herself.*

COSINO.

What is amiss?

Madonna, are you ill?

LUCIANA.

No, it is nothing, —
a little faintness. Is it you, Cosino?

Thank you.

She sits on the bench beside the door.

COSINO.

Shall I not call Madonna Giulia?

LUCIANA.

Not for the world. Poor sister! Yesterday came this same sudden blur upon the world and I lost sense a moment. I could scarce make her believe that it was not the plague. I thought to see her sicken for sheer fright. Since the great horror of a year ago, an aching tooth portends the plague to her, and when she leaves the shelter of the house she draws her breath through spices lest she die.

COSINO.

'T was not a thing to easily forget.
I lost my father and my mother then,
and nearly all my master's kinsfolk died.
I've heard Messer Cecchino tell the tale
of how my master came from Mantua
and found a stranger in his father's house.
He is so droll, one nearly dies of laughing, —
but Monna Liperata cannot bear

to hear it — she's their sister, did you know?
They love her dearly. When her husband died,
her husband and her baby, in the plague,
Messer Cecchino found her a new man
almost before she had had time to grieve.
There's a good brother, is he not, Madonna?

LUCIANA.

She married this new suitor?

COSINO.

Eh, what else?

LUCIANA.

Were I a widow, I could never wed.

COSINO.

But you are rich, Madonna. Such as we —

GIULIA, *speaking from within.*

Luciana! do not stay so long without!

The air is evil.

LUCIANA.

No, 't is very sweet
and full of spring. Come to the door a moment.
You stifle in the house.

*GIULIA appears at the door with a scarf about
her head and a spice ball, the odour of which she
inhales frequently.*

GIULIA.

Pray you, come in.

You want your husband to come home and find his house left empty?

COSINO.

As my master did.

GIULIA.

Who's here? Ah yes, — the goldsmith's errand-boy as saucy as his master. I suppose you came to get your daily dole of sweets. You hop across here like a bird for crumbs.

LUCIANA.

Indeed, I had forgotten. Wait, Cosino, and I will bring them. *She goes into the house.*

GIULIA.

Boy, have you no shame to be so idle?

COSINO.

Why do you live here and show your face at window, if you chide the lad across the street for gazing?

GIULIA.

Ah, sly little courtier! What a child you are!

COSINO.

Not all a child, Madonna! In the sun of my quick master, green fruit ripens soon.

GIULIA.

So 't is your master's teaching makes your tongue
so glib in dainty speeches? Tell me, boy,
is he the generous lover he is rumoured?

COSINO.

Generous, — 't is not the word. Say prodigal!

GIULIA.

He is a proper fellow.

COSINO.

Women's hearts
are meat to him. Even Favilla yonder
will take no gold of him. His very glance
is deadly as the plague. —

GIULIA, *crossing herself*.

Be still, be still!

Ill jesting!

COSINO.

Nay, but are you still afraid?
There's but a memory left, — a woman died
here in the street to-day, —

GIULIA.

God save us! where?

Was it the plague?

COSINO.

Nay, but I scarcely know, —
mayhap. But even so, what do you fear?

you, who may breathe through spices, and need set no foot in common streets. Were it in your house —

GIULIA, *passionately,*

Oh, were it in my house, I would not taint my nostrils for one moment with the air the dead had breathed. The grave should take its within the hour, were it my sister's self! [own

With a gasp of horror she darts in and slams the door. COSINO chuckles mischievously.

COSINO.

Were it your sister's self! Ay, that is true, I'd swear you would be better than your word. Bah! that for such a love! An empty fool, cares but for her own skin. I am right glad I frightened her so soundly. Ah, who's here? — Monna Guicciarda, — in a temper too! This is a busy day.

GUICCIARDA *sweeps angrily into the shop.*

GUICCIARDA.

Where is your master?

NANDO, *rising and bowing.*

Busy, at your service.

GUICCIARDA, *mollified.*

Ah, busy at my service? But he said my platter should be done to-day.

NANDO.

It is, —

behold it.

GUICCIARDA.

 This? Then how can he be busy
at any work of mine?

NANDO.

 I meant not that.

The “busy” was my master’s part, — the rest
my proper courtesy.

GUICCIARDA.

 So! very fine!

Why did my servant get no courtesy
when he came here a little while ago?

NANDO.

I had not then finished your work, Madonna.

GUICCIARDA.

You had not finished it? — Whose work is this?

NANDO, *booming*.

My own.

GUICCIARDA.

 All yours?

NANDO.

 I needs must tell the truth.

The shaping and design are but my master’s.

GUICCIARDA.

If I should say all that is in my mind
I should but waste my breath. But may I ask
what hindered him from serving me himself?

NANDO.

These three days he has laboured without cease
and shut himself from everyone. See here —
here is a Cardinal's platter, — it must wait.

Here is a golden goblet for a duke,
his coat of arms half graven. Ah, Madonna,
believe me, 't is my master's courtesy
to ladies that has given you your dish
albeit with my humble chiselling.

GUICCIARDA.

His courtesy to ladies, — yes, I think
that I have heard it spoken of. Perhaps
this special task that now claims all his mind
betrays that courtesy.

NANDO.

I scarce may say.

GUICCIARDA.

Well, I will take the dish, — and here 's your pay, —
more than its value.

NANDO.

Some day I shall grow
as famous as my master, and your heirs

will thank you for your graciousness, Madonna,
as I do now.

GUICCIARDA.

Whether you ever gain
your master's skill and fame or not, at least
you have his impudence already.

NANDO.

Ah!

My thanks! I hear 't was so that he began.

*GUICCIARDA, followed by her servant carrying
the plate, leaves the shop as LUCIANA comes to
the window with Cosino's sweetmeats.*

LUCIANA.

Ah, Guicciarda! Will you not come in?

Giulia has some new fear about the plague,
and is half mad with terror. Help me cheer her.

GUICCIARDA goes in.

Cosino!

COSINO.

Here, Madonna. I was waiting.

LUCIANA gives him the sweets.

My thanks. — Ah, these are better than the last.

LUCIANA.

You are a saucy boy.

COSINO.

If I were not

so pretty you would call me impudent.
My master says I have a ready wit,
but it is not as pointed as his own.

He throws himself into a fencing attitude.

There's a keen quality in his that often
goes to the very heart. He thinks no more
of slipping poniard into throat than I
of eating sweetmeats — so!

LUCIANA.

Your master's wit
is far too ready, child. If you will take
him as your model, let it be his skill,
his cunning workmanship and rare device,
his faithfulness in labour. —

COSINO.

But all that
is not what pleases me so much in him
as his wild bravery, — his open heart. —

LUCIANA.

His open heart, — too open, like an inn
where any random traveller may lodge.
He is a scandal, even here in Florence.
Nay, but you are a child. You should not hear
such evils named.

COSINO, *laughing*.

I'm wiser than you think.

LUCIANA, *with grave pity.*

Poor child — your dreams are nourished by his vile-
your thoughts have fed on it, until at last [ness, —
you are a lovely little poison-flower
such as could grow nowhere in all the world
save in the streets of Florence, — strange perversion
of childish beauty, — for except your eyes
you are a child, as other little lads.

COSINO, *resentfully.*

I cannot see why you should pity me.
Cellini is my master, and for that
I might be envied by no matter whom, —
man, boy, or woman either.

LUCIANA, *coldly.*

Go your way, —

for since you serve him, you should serve him well.

*She closes the window. 🌿 COSINO returns to
the shop.*

NANDO.

I am right glad 'twas Monna Guicciarda
whose plate I had to finish; she is far
too lazy to protest; but had it been
the queen of Shrews, I would face even her
balked in a whim to please him. Luck to him,
long life, short love, good fortune! Benvenuto!

the king of goldsmiths! That I know is true,
since 'twas himself who told me.

COSINO *goes sulkily into the inner room without answer.* *NANDO looks after him in comical surprise.*

NANDO.

Eh? What's wrong?

VOICES WITHOUT, *singing.*

Wine and love and laughter, —
Who cares what comes after?
Light of heart and light of purse,
Take the jest and leave the curse.
Leave to friars fast and prayer, —
Who with them a heaven would share?
Hell will find us laughing yet,
Jolly comrades merry met.

*Enter CECCHINO, BEPPUCCIO and LEONE
arm in arm.*

CECCHINO.

Ho, Nando! is my brother here?

NANDO.

He is,

but very busy, — will not be disturbed.

CECCHINO.

Fie on him for a crawling ant to toil

on such a day! Beppuccio! Leone!
come, let us rout him out. Ho, Benvenuto!
BENVENUTO, *from the upper room.*

He is upon a journey.

BEPPUCCIO.

No, Cellini,

that will not serve. We know your voice. Come out!
BENVENUTO.

Go, get you gone. I have no time for folly.

CECCHINO.

Have you turned virtuous?

BENVENUTO.

No, that's left for you.

LEONE.

But come! We will be gay, I promise you.

BENVENUTO.

I tell you I am working. Let me be.

CECCHINO.

We are going to Favilla's. Does that move you?

BENVENUTO.

To bid you go.

BEPPUCCIO.

What work have you to do
that keeps you from Favilla, and the road
up to Fiesole? The almond flowers
are sweet in the spring sun.

BENVENUTO.

Go to the devil
and take Favilla with you.

BEPPUCCIO.

By your leave,
Fiesole were pleasanter, my friend.

LEONE.

Farewell, Cellini! We will go without you.

BENVENUTO.

Then save your breath to help you on the way.

CECCHINO.

Nay, this is but some new mad whim of yours.

I'll drag you out!

*He starts up the steps and the door is slammed
in his face; the bolt is shot within. He shrugs
his shoulders.*

In half an hour perhaps
he will be weary, and of mellow mind.

Now 'tis no use.

LEONE.

We'll try him later, then. —
Our merry company would lose its best
if he were absent.

As they go out on the street they meet LIPERATA.

BEPPUCCIO, *bowing.*

Monna Liperata.

LEONE, *bowing*.
My homage to you.
CECCHINO.

Sister, 'tis no use.
He shut his door right in my face.
LIPERATA.

And yet
I think that I may open it. Good day,
gentlemen, — brother. *She passes on.*
CECCHINO, *absent-mindedly*.

Wine and love and laughter, —
Who cares —
*With a sudden glance around after Liperata, he
checks himself. They go out quietly.*

LIPERATA, *entering the shop*.
Is my brother here?

NANDO, *pointing at the shut door*.
Behind that door.

LIPERATA.
Then easy to be found.
She goes up the steps and knocks at the door.
BENVENUTO, *in an exasperated roar*.

Who's there?
LIPERATA.
No one but Liperata.

BENVENUTO,

suddenly opening the door and catching her in his arms.

What,
you, little sister? You are always welcome.

LIPERATA.

Always?

BENVENUTO.

You never come when you are not.

LIPERATA.

Discreetly answered. What have you been doing to make you shut your door in Cecco's face?

BENVENUTO,

holding up a necklace of fine gold work with a topaz pendant.

This.

LIPERATA.

May I see it closer?

BENVENUTO.

In a moment.

I have a touch or two to give it more.

He sits down at the table and adds the finishing touches, singing to himself while LIPERATA watches him under pretence of examining his work.

BENVENUTO, *singing.*

I am my own best prize, —
Fortune and fame may wait
If in my own clear eyes
I be accounted great.
That is my high estate, —
There my ambition lies.
I am my proper fate, —
I am my own best prize.

*He holds up the work and scrutinizes it. Then
polishes it softly with a cloth.*

I am my own reward.
Others I do not spurn;
Never have I abhorred
All I did fairly earn.
But if the world should turn,
Rail where it once adored, —
Smiling I bid men learn
I am my own reward.

*He polishes on mechanically, while his eyes fix
themselves on the opposite house.*

I am my own content, —
Love cannot frown on me.
What if my soul be spent
Vainly and secretly?
What if I sigh to see

Eyes upon others bent?
If I the worthier be,
I am my own content.

A moment's silence. Then he rouses himself.

BENVENUTO.

There, 't is done now. Is it not beautiful?
I never made a fairer. What could be
more admirable than that wreath of flowers
whose tendrils hold the topaz like a drop
of golden dew that knows itself so fair
in its own place that it is loth to fall!

LIPERATA.

Nothing could be more beautiful, dear brother.
I never saw such cunning workmanship.

BENVENUTO.

There never was till now.

LIPERATA.

For whom is it?

For some great lady?

BENVENUTO.

Great in wealth and beauty

and virtue — yes.

LIPERATA.

Will you not tell me more?

BENVENUTO.

Some day, — perhaps.

LIPERATA.

You love her, Benvenuto.

BENVENUTO.

That might be true.

LIPERATA.

And is. Ah, tell me, brother,
how do you love her? Somehow in your eyes
I fancy that I read new lore, — and yet
I dare not trust my hope. You called her great
in virtue — judge you as your father's son
or only as a Florentine?

BENVENUTO.

I love
as I had never thought to love a woman.

LIPERATA.

Then you will wed her?

BENVENUTO.

Till I saw her face
I never wished a woman for my wife.

LIPERATA.

You set a fountain laughing in my heart,
that flings its joyous drops into my eyes.
You cannot know how I have longed for this.

BENVENUTO.

Patience a little longer. Not a word
until I bid you.

LIPERATA.

She is not yet won?

BENVENUTO.

Not yet. But I shall speak my love to-day.

LIPERATA.

God speed your wooing.

BENVENUTO.

Ay. Amen to that.

LIPERATA.

Is this her name, woven so cunningly
among the flowers?

BENVENUTO.

Hush, do not speak it here.

LIPERATA.

'T is — (*whispers. He nods.*)

I will speak it in my prayers to-night.

BENVENUTO.

To-night — it may be I will come to-night
to sit away a twilight hour with you.

LIPERATA.

And may there be good news upon your lips.

Your room is always ready. You will be
as ever, welcome. I am for the time
deserted, save for Nonna.

BENVENUTO.

Good old soul!

LIPERATA.

I would have gladly been alone awhile,
but she so loves to feel my need of her.

BENVENUTO.

Where is your husband's journey now?

LIPERATA.

To Rome.

'T was yesterday he went.

BENVENUTO.

To Rome — to Rome.

Some day perhaps I shall be off to Rome.
I stifle in our narrow streets, — I crave
wide spaces and great patrons, — but not yet.
Rome must have patience for a little longer.
Now off about your errands. I must take
this jewel to its owner.

LIPERATA.

For the world,

I would not hinder you. Until to-night.

Will you not tell me who she is?

BENVENUTO.

Not yet.

Suffice it, that I act the Christian's part,
and love my neighbour better than myself.

LIPERATA.

A neighbour? That will serve — until to-night.

She goes.

BENVENUTO, *drawing a sigh of relief.*

Well, praise the saints, I did not lie to her,
but for a moment, I was sorely pressed.

And now for her —

*He lays his hand on the latch, but stops as her
door opens opposite and she comes out with*

GUICCIARDA.

GUICCIARDA.

I was so dazed with anger

I said no word. His prentice!

LUCIANA.

Now my hope

of wearing my new trinket to your house
this afternoon grows small. How shall I fare
if you are slighted? Haply I shall have
Cosino's maiden work.

GUICCIARDA.

'T would not be strange —

Are you not well to-day? How pale you are!

LUCIANA.

I am a little weary, and perhaps
a little heavy in my heart as well.
My husband left this morning.

GUICCIARDA.

And you grieve!

Beware lest angels snatch you up to heaven
to join their company before your time.

She goes out. ❀ LUCIANA *stands hesitating a moment. Then crosses and knocks at Benvenuto's door.*

BENVENUTO,

dismissing NANDO with a gesture that sends him scurrying in bewildered haste, opens the door.

Madonna! I was on my way to you.

LUCIANA.

My work is done then?

BENVENUTO, *giving her the necklace.*

Does it please you?

LUCIANA, *gasping in admiration.*

Ah!

It is a masterpiece, — a miracle.

But this is your own work.

BENVENUTO.

No other hands

have touched it.

LUCIANA.

Was it this at which you wrought
when others waited?

BENVENUTO.

This.

LUCIANA.

I scarce can hope
to pay you for this web of fairy sunlight
in gross, substantial coin, — still less for all
your time and kindness, but there is no mint
for Spring's bright gold, so I must offer you
man's currency, albeit with some shame.

What is your price?

BENVENUTO.

The smile upon your lips,
the quick approval in your eyes. Already
you have overpaid me.

LUCIANA.

Pretty compliments
and wrought as deftly as your gold. I crave
but a plain answer.

BENVENUTO.

I have given it.

LUCIANA.

What, must I set the price myself? Then here
is what my husband left for your repayment.
If 'tis too little, blame yourself, not me,
since I am all incapable of judging
the value of such work. I can but praise.

BENVENUTO.

Your praise is all I want. As for your gold,
I will not take it. Is that plain enough?

LUCIANA.

Too plain, sir. This is generosity
that smacks of folly. Have you never heard
the saying that the devil laughs to see
the poor give to the rich?

BENVENUTO, *whimsically*.

Indeed, I know
that by your standards I am counted poor.
Yet I am minded that he shall for once
be merry at my cost. I pity him
for all the long monotony of Hell.
To suffer for all time is not so hard,
if 'tis for pleasant hours one pays, — but ah!
to punish poor weak sinners evermore
is a most wretched lot. Pray you, Madonna,
grant him a moment's ease, and take my work.

LUCIANA.

Were it a trifle — but this costly thing —

BENVENUTO.

Ay, and the cost is more than you can see.
It is because it is so rich a gift
that I would have you take it. Day and night
my hand and brain have wrought to serve your
as Emperor or Pope would not be served. [pleasure
My soul is in this fragile mesh of gold
that I could grind to pulp beneath my heel, —

Cellini's soul, — the master among masters.

Now can you see why it must be a gift?

LUCIANA, *shrinking back a little.*

I do not understand.

BENVENUTO, *his eyes upon her.*

What pays for love?

LUCIANA *stands looking at him for a moment.*

Then with a little cry she sinks into a chair, covering her face with her hands.

LUCIANA.

How have I been to blame? What word of mine or look has been your warrant? Or perhaps you only thought all women were alike.

BENVENUTO.

I did not ask for payment.

LUCIANA.

Peace — oh, peace!

Am I not shamed enough?

BENVENUTO.

You do me wrong.

I would not pilfer a friend's light'o'love, — far less his wife. I am a man of honour.

I would but give, — what shame or harm to you in knowing that I love you? All these days when I have watched you going in and out, you never felt my gaze and turned to meet it.

You never saw me in the twilight sit
night after night to watch your window glow.
I was to you no more than were the walls
that housed me. Why is it so strange a thing
that I should love you? May not any man
covet an emperor's crown? I never thought
ever to love as I love you, so much
I honour you. Love was to me a game,
a sport, a whim, to cast aside at will,
but you have wound your way into my heart
as here your name is twined among the flowers.
If you were mine, what might I not attain
being so great without you? — Rail at me,
for God's sake! chide me! show yourself a shrew!
but do not sit there with those sweet sad eyes
that make my blood a fire! You do not know
what love like mine may mean.

LUCIANA.

I guess too well.

If love like yours blossomed in noble deeds,
in sacrifice and honour, I were proud
to know you gave it me. But as it is,
I blush to think that I have heard you speak
such words to me.

BENVENUTO.

What have I said to you

that is not honourable? Have I asked
ought of your heart save tolerance?

LUCIANA.

In words,
no. 'T is the voice in which the words were said.

BENVENUTO.

And yet you listened.

LUCIANA.

You do well to bring
my weakness to my mind.

BENVENUTO.

Then you were weak?
Do not take back the words; for they will be
as are remembered riches to a man
fallen in poverty unmerited.

I am ten thousand times more worth your love
than your Domizio, — where's the miracle
if for the moment that were plain to you?

LUCIANA.

I have deserved this, doubtless.

BENVENUTO.

If your heart
for one quick beat answered the pulse of mine, —
if for an instant you beheld my face
with eyes that crowned it with love's aureole,
tell me, — or no, I will not ask for words;
give me a sign. Will you not take my gift?

LUCIANA.

Now, more than ever, no.

BENVENUTO, *with elaborate lightness.*

I had not thought
you could be so ungenerous. Take the gem

He wrenches the topaz from the fragile setting.
and bid another set it, who will take
your gold in payment; yet he will not make
so fair a work as I have done. Alas,
will you not give me even your hand to kiss?
Well, as you will. As ever, at your service.

*He opens the door, and bows her out. Then
returns and stands weighing the necklace in his
hand. Suddenly with a smothered oath he lifts
it to fling it on the ground, — then as suddenly
sits at the table and bows his head on his arm,
pressing the bit of gold to his lips.*

BENVENUTO, *whimsically, to the necklace.*

She did not understand us, you and me.

We meant no harm. She did not understand.

Down the street comes a sound of singing.

Wine and love and laughter, —

Who cares what comes after?

Light of heart and light of purse —

BENVENUTO *throws the necklace into a casket
and turns the key.*

BENVENUTO.

Take the jest and leave the curse —
By all the saints! am I a man or no?

A jovial company, flower-crowned, appear,
CECCHINO, BEPPUCCIO, LEONE and FOUR GIRLS.

CECCHINO.

Ah, Benvenuto! Are you wiser now?

BENVENUTO.

Ay, truly!

FAVILLA.

Then you come with us?

BENVENUTO, *recklessly,*

Why not?

With a shout they welcome him, and the company dances out singing, his voice the loudest of all. In front of Domizio's house he pauses, looks up at the window, and drawing FAVILLA roughly to him, kisses her.

- CURTAIN. -





SECOND ACT — Night.

✿ *Liperata's house, opening at the back on the road to Fiesole. Through the window almond trees in blossom are seen in the fitful moonlight. There are doors on the right and left. MONNA ANDREA sits nodding in a large chair. LIPERATA kneels on a settle by the window, looking out. Her work lies beside her. A party passes with music of guitars and mandolins.*

ANDREA, *waking with a start.*

Child, are you sewing? Put your work away.
It has grown dark before I noticed.

LIPERATA, *turning with a smile.*

Ah!

you have been drowsing. Long ago I laid
my work aside.

ANDREA.

What, drowsy? No, not I.
A little lost in thought, perhaps. The old
have much to dream of.

LIPERATA.

Then I must be old.

ANDREA.

Brooding again, dear child? I'll light the lamp.

LIPERATA.

No, no — a little longer let us sit
and watch the darkness gather. We may steal
an idle hour of all this busy day.

This is the time when toilers are at rest,
before the noisy revellers go abroad,
the breathing-space for weary Florence. See,
light after light comes pricking through the gloom,—
each of those bright points marks a home — a place
of common love and light of childish eyes.

And each one makes the night more beautiful
for us two women in our unlit house.

ANDREA.

Is your heart happy and at peace?

LIPERATA.

Why not?

ANDREA.

Somehow to-night brings back the time to me
when dazed with sorrows swiftly multiplied,
robbed in a day of parents, husband, child,
you came to me as might a storm-beat bird.

LIPERATA.

I was not robbed of them. God took them back.

ANDREA.

I never saw you weep for them but once,
and that was on your second wedding-day.

LIPERATA.

Then it was not for for them.

ANDREA.

What then?

LIPERATA, *half in a whisper.*

I think

it was for all my pretty girlish dreams,
the dawning joy, the first of everything,
that never more could be again for me.

She rises briskly.

Shall I not fetch a little pot of coals?

The air is chill, for all its scent of spring.

ANDREA.

My bones have told me there will be a storm.

LIPERATA *goes into the adjoining room. Her
voice comes back through the open door.*

LIPERATA.

It must be that delays my brother.

ANDREA.

Which

did you expect to-night, — noisy Cecchino,
or blustering Benvenuto?

LIPERATA, *coming back with a glowing scaldino.*

Ah, poor lads, —

why can you not be somewhat tolerant?

ANDREA.

They are grown men, and should know better ways.

LIPERATA, *softly.*

Somehow to me they seem but little boys,
but little wayward boys.

ANDREA.

To hearts like yours

all men are only little wayward boys
who need a mother. I remember well
you used to mother your own father.

LIPERATA.

Ay, —

She breaks from her reverie with a smile.

't is Benvenuto I expect to-night.

ANDREA.

Then I'll to bed before he comes, and leave
you two to talk at ease. I cannot bear
his noisy chaff.

LIPERATA.

Yet he is fond of you.

ANDREA, *ironically.*

Ay, like enough. I am not young or fair,
that I should take his roving eye. Good-night.

LIPERATA.

Good-night, dear Nonna, if you will.

She kisses MONNA ANDREA. The old woman stands for a moment peering at her face, dimly lit by the glow of the scaldino. Then she turns away, and goes into the adjoining room, left.

LIPERATA.

A moment,—

take the scaldino. It was to your bones
the storm sent warning message, not to mine.

The door closes. LIPERATA sits down at the window in the moonlight. After a moment she begins to sing, abstractedly.

LIPERATA, *singing.*

God has set to cheer his children
Daisies by the dusty ways,
Poppies red between the furrows,
Nights between the days.

Daisies plucked are cast to wither,
Shaken poppies at our feet
Scatter soon their scarlet petals, —
Rest is always sweet.

'Neath the touch of Night's cool fingers
Weary eyes, forget to weep, —
Take the blessing that she brings you,
Sleep — sleep — sleep.

LIPERATA.

Come, let me light a lamp, and make one more
small cheery star in this our firmament.

*She lights the lamp. As she does so, COSINO'S
face peers in at the window. He is panting as
if from great haste.*

COSINO.

Where's Messer Benvenuto?

LIPERATA, *turning with a start.*

What's amiss?

He is not here.

COSINO.

I must look farther then.

Perhaps he still is at Fiesole.

LIPERATA, *bewildered.*

Fiesole? What's wrong? — Cecchino —

COSINO.

No, —

'T is Monna Luciana. She is dead.

LIPERATA.

Dead — Luciana! 'T is the name I saw
wrought in the necklace. Dead! — Cosino, stay!
he may come here before you find him. Tell me,
when did she die?

COSINO.

To-day.

LIPERATA.

To-day! Oh, no!

it cannot be!

COSINO.

It is. And on the instant
her coward sister, thinking it the plague,
thrust her scarce blest into the tomb and fled.
'T was half my fault. I frightened her this morning.
'T is at the little church down yonder there
they buried her. I must go seek my master.

He vanishes into the dusk.

LIPERATA, *sinking into a seat by the window.*

Oh, my poor Benvenuto! I had hoped
so much from this, — an end to anxious fears
for me, to wandering loves for you, — and now —
oh, my poor brother! my poor Benvenuto!

*She hides her face in her hands. ♫ Outside is
heard noisy revelry from which BENVENUTO'S
voice rises in song.*

BENVENUTO, *singing.*

Love's a breeze that comes and goes,
Love's a game for playing.
What's the odds if no one knows
Where love's feet go straying?
Coyness cannot make you dearer, —
Youth's too brief for wasting.

Nearer, sweet! a little nearer!

Lips were made for tasting.

He breaks off into excited speech.

No, no — I'll go no farther for to-night.

I'll in to see my sister, — my dear sister, —

my little Liperata, — twice a wife

but always just a little maid to me.

Hey, Liperata!

VOICES OUTSIDE.

Then good-night to you!

We are for Florence!

BENVENUTO, *appearing in the doorway.*

Liperata, — ho!

why do you leave your door unlocked like this?

LIPERATA, *slowly.*

I thought that you would come.

BENVENUTO.

Best have a care, —

this road is full of drunken roisterers.

LIPERATA.

True, — so it is.

BENVENUTO.

Where's Nonna? Gone to bed!

It is too early, — but she's old. I wonder

if ever she sat up a sweet spring night

drinking rich wine all golden in the moon?

He meditates the subject gravely a moment, then bursts into boisterous laughter at the picture evoked.

She would be droll! Eh? why do you not laugh?

LIPERATA.

Oh, Benvenuto!

BENVENUTO, *becoming irritable.*

What a dismal face!

What if I am a little warm with wine?

Is that a reason you should gloom on me with such a pale shocked visage? Or perhaps it is because Favilla poured the cup.

What's the harm there? She is a liberal heart, no miser of her smiles, no petty prude, — what harm to spend a holiday with her?

LIPERATA.

And in what moment of that holiday thought you of Luciana?

BENVENUTO.

Luciana!

'T is the first moment of the whole long day I had forgotten her, — and you recall her name to me. Why do you speak of her?

LIPERATA.

Oh, Benvenuto!

BENVENUTO.

So you know the truth, —
and thus you prelude more reproaches, — well,
husband your breath till I transgress indeed.
She will have nought of me, — so wish her joy
of her Domizio, her kind dull spouse,
her household god all made of earthenware.

LIPERATA.

What, Benvenuto! Was she married?
BENVENUTO.

Was,

and is, and ever shall be, — so Amen!

LIPERATA.

Then for your sake 'tis better she is dead!

BENVENUTO,

looking at her, dazed, for a moment.

Dead? Who says she is dead? She is alive
and beautiful — too lovely for an angel.

LIPERATA.

Cosino did not find you then?

BENVENUTO.

Cosino?

What do you mean?

LIPERATA.

Brother, she died to-day.
She lies, unseemly hurried to the tomb,
already in the little chapel yonder.

BENVENUTO,

suddenly sobered by the look on her face.

To-day, — it cannot be — what lie is this?

You jest — (*in a sudden groan of agony*)

is this the truth?

LIPERATA, *mercilessly.*

Look for yourself.

At the sight of his silent pain she softens and stretches out her hands to him.

O Benvenuto! did you love her so?

BENVENUTO, *in a numb, even voice.*

I loved her even as I honoured her,

and that was much. Where is the chapel, sister?

There where the two tall cedars sway like spires
rocked by an earthquake?

LIPERATA.

Do not go to-night.

You are distraught with grief, — the storm is near, —
mourn at her grave to-morrow if you will!

I was too harsh!

BENVENUTO, *in the same mechanical voice.*

While I was revelling
to-day, she died. Now, while her faithful eyes
gaze on the face of angels, let me kneel
beside her in the night and storm alone.

He kisses LIPERATA'S forehead and goes out. She follows him to the door, mechanically extending her hand to see if the rain has begun.

LIPERATA, *recalling herself with a start.*

I must be busy. My poor Benvenuto!

I will prepare his room and warm a cup
of spicy sleeping-draught for him. Poor boy, —
body and soul will cry for tender care
when he comes back to me.

She goes into the room on the right.

FAVILLA, *speaking outside.*

I tell you, no.

I will not leave him here!

CECCHINO.

The devil take you!

Why did you take so long to find it out,
then drag us back with a preposterous tale
of a lost jewel? We shall all be drenched.

FAVILLA, *at the door.*

Then I'll house here.

CECCHINO.

Not you. You should not cross
my sister's threshold.

FAVILLA, *laughing angrily.*

Why, upon the street
we have brushed elbows often, and in truth
often enough my foot has passed your door.

CECCHINO.

That's not the same.

BEPPUCCIO.

Cecchino's in the right.

Your head is turned with wine.

LEONE.

Come back to Florence.

The night is young, — what place is this for revel?

FAVILLA, *stubbornly*.

Not without Benvenuto!

CECCHINO.

Come, I say!

COSINO, *outside*.

Madonna! oh, madonna!

He flings himself in at the door and stops.

CECCHINO.

What, Cosino?

Why are you here?

COSINO, *sullenly alert*.

I came to seek my master.

BEPPUCCIO.

Why, what's amiss?

COSINO.

Nando is very ill,

and but an hour ago a thief broke in

and stole two golden cups and three large plates

and a small box of gems —

FAVILLA.

And I'll be sworn
that all this means a message from a woman.

COSINO.

You ought to know him well.

FAVILLA.

And so I do.

And on the strength of that same lore I wager
that even now he's hiding hereabout.

Ho, Benvenuto!

LIPERATA, *coming from the inner room.*

Did you wish to see

Signor Cellini?

CECCHINO, *apologetically.*

Sister!

LIPERATA.

He is gone.

FAVILLA.

Gone, — 't is a lie!

CECCHINO.

Be still!

LIPERATA.

Do you believe me?

Her eyes meet FAVILLA'S unflinchingly. After a moment the latter's gaze falters and she turns away muttering.

FAVILLA.

Yes, I believe you. He might well be gone.
He is not one to tarry in a hole
scarce lighted, with a sheet-faced, sullen thing —
his sister too. — Come, let's be going, — fie, —
why have I wasted time? Upon my oath
I'll find him at my house when I return.
Come, let's be going.

CECCHINO.

Sister —

LIPERATA.

I am glad
to meet your friends, my brother. Now, good-night.
*He swings on his heel abashedly swearing and
follows the rest. ✿ LIPERATA stands cold and
immovable looking at the door.*

COSINO, *eagerly.*

Madonna —

LIPERATA, *musling disgustedly.*

Benvenuto — on her lips
it sounded horrible, as if one smeared
filth on a diamond.

COSINO.

Ah, but hear, Madonna!

LIPERATA.

What would you tell me, child?

COSINO.

Only this morning,
she dropped the purse, — she was a little faint.

She said —

LIPERATA, *stooping to him anxiously.*

Child, are you ill?

COSINO.

No, no — and then
she said that yesterday it was the same —
a sudden darkness — and her sister feared —
out on her for a chicken-heart!

LIPERATA.

Cosino!

The shock has turned his brain. — Cosino, boy —
be still a moment.

COSINO.

So of course you see
it is not strange, although a priest would say
it was a miracle.

LIPERATA.

Cosino — what?

what is not strange?

COSINO.

I told you long ago, —
she is alive!

LIPERATA.

Alive!

COSINO.

She was not dead, —
she never has been dead! He is coming here,
he brings her here, here in his arms, Madonna!
She is alive —

*He buries his head in LIPERATA'S dress laughing
and crying with excitement.*

LIPERATA, *pressing her hands to her forehead.*

Is not this night a dream?

I shall wake presently. I never thought
that Benvenuto loved, — she never died, —
that woman never came here. I have dreamed. —

*The storm comes nearer. ✨ In a flash of lightning
BENVENUTO appears at the door carrying LUCIANA.*
It was like this the night my baby died.

*BENVENUTO comes in and lays LUCIANA on the
settle. ⚡ The storm breaks.*

BENVENUTO.

She was not dead — she is alive — alive!
Come, Liperata! chafe her hands — undo
that strangling gown — these tender ministries
are best in women's hands. She is alive!

LIPERATA, *obeying mechanically.*

But tell me, Benvenuto —

BENVENUTO.

Nay, I scarce
can tell myself how it befell. It seems
a miracle. As I drew near her tomb
I heard a cry of terror — then a gasp,
and silence. There I found her in a swoon, —
and that is all. See how the tender rose
creeps back into her face.

LIPERATA.

Her eyelids flutter. —

Where is her husband?

BENVENUTO.

Gone upon a journey.

LIPERATA.

To-morrow we must take her home.

BENVENUTO.

What home?

A house whence all the frightened rats have fled,
left desert by the pestilence of fear?

LIPERATA.

Till he returns, she can lodge here with me.

We two will care for her, Nonna and I.

BENVENUTO.

Nonna and you. —

LIPERATA.

She has an angel's face.

I do not wonder, brother —

BENVENUTO.

Liperata, —

I took her from the grave. Had I not come,
she would be dead now as they thought she was.
Her life that was Domizio's is ended.

Whose is the new life that has just begun?
Through the hot damp of the approaching storm
I bore her in my arms, that precious weight
warm on my bosom, that soft mist of hair
fragrant against my face. They buried it,
the lovely form Domizio held so dear.

Whose is the body I have raised to life?

Whose?

LIPERATA.

Benvenuto!

BENVENUTO.

Is it not my own?

LIPERATA gazes at him thunderstruck across the
still unconscious LUCIANA. ✂ COSINO, fascinated,
crouches near, gazing at the two, unnoticed by
them. ✂ A pause.

LUCIANA, opening her eyes.

Where am I?

LIPERATA,

*involuntarily putting her arms about her pro-
tectingly.*

With a friend.

LUCIANA.

How came I here?

BENVENUTO.

I brought you here.

LUCIANA.

There was a deadly darkness,
a darkness and a horror of the grave.

Nothing beside — nothing beside —

BENVENUTO.

'T was I
who took you from the horror of the grave.

LUCIANA.

I cannot thank you, sir. What is your name,
that I may pray the saints to bless you?

BENVENUTO.

What,
do you not know me?

LUCIANA.

No. What is your name?

BENVENUTO, *hoarsely*.

My name is Benvenuto.

LUCIANA.

Truly called,
and welcome as the smile of God to me.

A moment's pause, then diffidently.

How am I called? Somehow I have forgotten.

I cannot think.

BENVENUTO, *slowly*.

Your name is Luciana.

LUCIANA.

It is an echo from some far-off time, —
some other life.

BENVENUTO.

Some other vanished life.

This life is new. Your heart is born to-night.

LUCIANA.

To-morrow you shall speak to me again.

Now I am weary.

LIPERATA.

Come with me.

LUCIANA,

her hand feebly groping for BENVENUTO'S.

With you?

Your eyes are kind. Yes, I will go with you.

Be near me, Benvenuto.

BENVENUTO, *kissing her hand fervently.*

While I live.

*He lifts her from the settle and supports her
toward the door. At the door he says intently.*

Are you content to lean upon me thus
in your new life?

*She looks at him in wide-eyed wonder. Then,
as if unconsciously, he draws her to him and*

kisses her, reverently at first, then with a fierce exultation.

BENVENUTO.

Luciana!

LUCIANA, *slowly and dreamily.*

Benvenuto —

LIPERATA *draws her into the room and shuts the door.*

COSINO, *breathlessly joyful.*

Master!

BENVENUTO, *startled.*

Cosino! here! I had forgot you.

You heard — you saw —

COSINO.

I am so glad for you!

BENVENUTO.

Can you keep silence, boy?

COSINO.

Always, for you.

BENVENUTO.

Go home, go home. You shall not lack reward.

Lock up the shop. I will stay here to-night.

COSINO, *wisely.*

Yes, master, yes. I'll make all very sure.

He goes out.

BENVENUTO.

I will stay here to-night; I will stay here
upon the threshold of my Paradise.

Upon the threshold, — nay, why linger there,
lest deeming me a laggard and a fool

Fate pluck again back to herself the gift
that she has dropped into my hand? Wild night,

*He goes to the door and stands looking out to
the storm.*

what is your storm to that which shakes my heart?

With such a blast to whirl me to the clouds,
why crawl an hour upon the sordid earth?

To heaven to-night — and then to Rome — to Rome.

Now am I truly great, — now do I stand
in places where my feet have trod in dreams.

Rome shall be richer for my joy. Oh, God,
thy justice gives me my deserts at last!

LIPERATA *returns.*

LIPERATA.

I left her praying.

BENVENUTO,

with a quick leaping step forward.

Ah!

LIPERATA, *staying him.*

What's in your heart?

BENVENUTO.

You know full well, — but shall I word it?

LIPERATA, *looking into his eyes.*

No.

BENVENUTO.

Her life is mine by right. She has forgotten
what lay behind the sepulchre. To me
belongs this fair new tablet of her mind
to write on as I will.

LIPERATA.

She may remember, —
and under your fine writing may start out
her old, dear tale, to stare you both to shame.

BENVENUTO.

Be that my care! I will so compass her
with all the flaming wonder of my love
that if the past should e'er come back to her,
it will but make her turn to me more fondly.

LIPERATA.

You think you know a woman's heart.

BENVENUTO.

If not,

I've wasted many an hour.

LIPERATA.

In such a school
you think to learn such hearts as hers or mine!
How can — Favilla — teach you aught of her?

BENVENUTO.

Then let her teach me of herself! Favilla,
you have seen her?

LIPERATA.

I have seen her.

BENVENUTO.

Then you know
how infinitely coarse a thing she is
matched with this lady.

LIPERATA.

In a dream I see
that pale proud face defiled by wine and passion
to match the wanton's. That were work for devils
and not for you, my brother.

BENVENUTO.

Hold your peace!

I will not plead with you. You dwell in Florence,
you know our customs; and by all of them
she now is mine, to do with as I will;
for my will shall be hers. Stand you aside.

LIPERATA.

Have you no thought for her?

BENVENUTO.

One single thought—

I love her. Stand aside.

LIPERATA.

She loves her husband.

BENVENUTO.

She loved her husband. Now she shall love me.

LIPERATA.

Have you no fear of God?

BENVENUTO.

God sent this chance.

LIPERATA.

God sent it, — that is true. You know so much,
and cannot see what you would fling aside!

God sent you a great hour, a golden hour
when you might choose to be like other men,
or far beyond them, noble and apart.

And you have chosen just the common way, —
the way all loose-tongued, little-hearted Florence
might tread, ignobly joyous. Tread it, you.

Who stays you? Drink your sacramental wine
to thrill you to an hour's wild revel. Go, —
yet oh, my brother, since you choose this way,
I pray for you the time may never come
when your true self shall rouse him from his sleep
and cry aloud in agony and wrath, —
when you shall front the slow accusing vision
of what you might have been and would not be, —
and hide your face, abashed. Well has it wrought,
the evil of these years; I see you now,
tested and failing. Of the man I knew,

revered and loved, remains only the name, —
the name, — ay, and the valiant sounding speech.

My brother Benvenuto is no more. —

BENVENUTO.

Liperata!

LIPERATA.

You have chosen, — Florentine!

*A pause. ❀ Then BENVENUTO draws a long
breath and straightens himself.*

BENVENUTO.

Yes, I have chosen.

*He takes up his cloak, and flinging it on, strides
to the door. At the door he pauses and looks
back.*

Guard her well. Good-night.

He swings out into the storm, singing defiantly.

I am my own content, —

Love cannot frown on me.

*The lightning shows him passing the window,
his head bent, struggling with the storm. ❀*

*LIPERATA, with a sigh of relief and joy, slips to
her knees, her head resting against Luciana's
door, her trembling fingers fumbling at her girdle
for her rosary.*

- CURTAIN. -



THIRD ACT —

The following day. Late afternoon.

✿ *Benvenuto's upper room. Through the window is seen Domizio's window opposite. COSINO peers in by the door at the side (L) and comes in on tiptoe. He begins to gather up the dishes from the table, humming to himself. Gradually his song takes form thus.*

COSINO, *singing.*

Spring is laughing o'er the hills
In the blossomed almond-tree,
In the gold of daffodils,
In the murmur of the bee.
Joy and beauty
Now are duty.
Spring is laughing — why not we?

Spring is singing in the brooks,
In the leaves that kiss and sigh, —
In the flash of loving looks,
Tender pleading, sweet reply.
Hearts are glowing,
Youth is going, —
Spring is singing, — why not I?

At this point the door of Benvenuto's bedroom (R) flies open with a slam, and he appears, glowering. COSINO wavers a moment but stands his ground.

COSINO, *propitiatingly.*

See the bright clouds! The storm is past — out there.

BENVENUTO acknowledges the remark only by a frown, and goes to the window, where he stands looking sullenly out.

COSINO.

Your clothes are dry. I saw to that myself.

He waits a moment for an answer.

You know you said you would not come last night.

BENVENUTO turns growling; COSINO edges nearer the door, and continues.

I always thought she loved you, — did she not?—

I had not deemed there was a woman born who would not thank you for a smile. —

BENVENUTO.

Be still!

'T was my own choice that brought me home.

COSINO.

I knew

it must be so.

He sighs, looks at the untasted dishes, shakes a mystified head, and goes out slowly.

BENVENUTO.

Had it not been my choice!
I have done nobly as befits myself, —
but had I done as smaller men would do
this hour I might have been in Paradise.
There was no more denial left in her. —
She was all mine, — her lips gave back my kiss, —
and had she ever wakened to the past
it would have been in my embrace. But now, —
now I will be but as a dream to her.
She will not know the great thing I have done.
She will go back to him, — her husband. God!
I would not do for thee or all thy angels
what I have done that I might stand unstained
in my own sight! Now if I do not work
I shall go mad with dreaming. Let the blow
of steel on gold drive from my mind that voice,
“Be near me, Benvenuto!”

*He draws a bench to the table and seats himself
there to work.*

How to fashion
this handle, — were a simple garland best,
or some wild shape of goat-foot satyr, twined
with grape leaves, leering down into the cup?
That would be newer, rarer, more like me.
It shall be that. — She will come home again

and I shall see her going in and out.
I was far happier when I only dreamed
of what I missed. Now when I see her kiss
her husband, I shall feel again the stab
of that wild pain of joy that thrilled in me
how long ago, — only last night?

*His work lies unnoticed. He sits, his chin in his
hands, looking into space.*

It seems
longer ago than that. I cannot stay
here at her threshold, — I must go away.
To Rome. I shall do greater work in Rome.
How I shall fill them with astonishment. —
But oh, with her, how gladly had I gone,
and now I spur my heart with its own pride
to thoughts and hopes that I must needs have curbed
had I been — nothing but a Florentine.

*The twilight gathers. As he sits brooding comes
an insistent knocking from the street. Gradually
he becomes conscious of it, rises, and goes to the
window.*

DOMIZIO, *speaking without.*

How's this? Is none within? What is amiss?

COSINO *steals in and comes to* BENVENUTO.

COSINO, *whispering.*

He has come back.

BENVENUTO.

Be still.

DOMIZIO.

What's wrong, I say!

Where are my people?

NANDO, *speaking without.*

Hush, sir, hush, I pray.

Come in, and I will tell you everything.

DOMIZIO.

What do you mean? What would you tell?

NANDO.

Come in.

A murmur from the room below, — then a heavy groan.

COSINO.

Nando has told him.

BENVENUTO, *as to himself.*

Once I stabbed a man, —
a worthless fellow who had hindered me.
He groaned like that when first the knife went in.
Go, bid him come to me.

COSINO.

What will you do?

You will not tell him she is living?

BENVENUTO.

Go.

COSINO goes. *Shortly afterward he enters with a lamp, followed by DOMIZIO. He is stunned by the blow. COSINO, obeying a nod from BENVENUTO, retires.*

DOMIZIO.

Why did you call me? He has told me all.

BENVENUTO.

What will you do?

DOMIZIO.

I scarcely know. My world is all in shards. Where did they bury her?

BENVENUTO.

Would you go mourn for her?

DOMIZIO.

And join her, — ay.

BENVENUTO.

What do you mean?

DOMIZIO.

Are there not roads enough by which a man may quit a world that stands robbed in a day of all that made it dear?

I see my way.

BENVENUTO.

You would go kill yourself there at her grave —

DOMIZIO.

Why do you eye me so?

BENVENUTO.

Why should I stay you?

DOMIZIO.

If you ever loved
beyond the lawless passions that have made
your name a by-word, you will stay me not,
knowing what life is worth when love is gone.

BENVENUTO.

Knowing what life is worth when love is gone —
Tell me, which is the bitterer to bear, —
love that was crowned with all accomplished joy,
and then is quenched in darkness, — or that love
that yields ere it has realized, — resigns
its flower yet budded to the hands of fate,
and breaks the chalice of its sacrament
as yet untasted?

DOMIZIO.

So you too have loved, —
and was that last your doom? I pity you, —
I, even I, naked of all my joy,
for I have known such heights of happiness
as made me like a god. Their memory
is mine forever, and will still be mine
in that far darkness into which I go.

BENVENUTO.

And into which I need but let you go.

Oh, God, was ever man so tempted? Say,
was it not great enough, my sacrifice,
that I must make it more? Did I not touch
the peaks last night? — Then I will scale them now.
Mine be that bitterer doom!

DOMIZIO.

How dark it is!

I must be gone. Where did they bury her?
I must be gone — by which door did I enter?

BENVENUTO.

Come with me. I will guide you where she is.

DOMIZIO.

Sir, you are courteous, but I pray you, leave me
when we have reached the place.

BENVENUTO.

I will not stay

to see your meeting — never fear for that.

I have a tale to tell you by the way.

*They go out together. 🌸 COSINO comes in and
lights the lamp.*

COSINO, *craning out of the window.*

They take the road up toward Fiesole.

What, will he lead her husband to her? Nay,
can he have tired of her so soon? These days
I cannot comprehend him.

CECCHINO, *speaking outside.*

Benvenuto!

Where is my brother, Nando?

NANDO, *outside.*

He went out

a moment since.

CECCHINO.

Well, I will wait awhile.

He comes in; throws himself into a chair and stretches.

Bah, I'm but half awake! Why must good wine leave such a knavish aching in the head?

Cosino, boy, I am not well. I feel a certain faintness. Does your master keep medicine for such ills? I know he does.

COSINO.

Have you not pain enough already?

CECCHINO.

Boy,

this is to cure the pain I have.

COSINO, *putting bottle on the table.*

Then here.

CECCHINO.

Where was your master last night?

COSINO.

He came home.

CECCHINO.

Here!

COSINO.

Yes.

CECCHINO.

Alone?

COSINO.

That's not for me to say.

CECCHINO.

Then he was not alone?

COSINO.

How is your pain?

CECCHINO.

Better. Hark you, Cosino, I've a plan.

COSINO.

It is —

CECCHINO.

Your master will return to-night?

COSINO.

How do I know?

CECCHINO.

Surely he will. — I think you know he will, you little rat. My faith, he shall not leave us in the lurch again. We will be ready for him when he comes, and greet his new-loved lady with all mirth.

Come now, be busy. Lay the table, boy.
I will go get good cheer, and call together
the guests. We shall be gay, I promise you.

COSINO.

I doubt if he is pleased.

CECCHINO.

A niggard he, —
a miser of his pleasures. Never yet
had I a love I would not share with him.
I'll fetch Favilla, — oh, there will be sport, —
rare sport! *He goes out.*

COSINO.

If I can only keep them here,
they will not seek him at Fiesole.

*He begins to lay the table. ♫ In the street voices
are heard singing "Wine and love and laughter."*

CECCHINO, *without, crying noisily.*

Go up, go up! I'll meet you there anon.

*Enter BEPPUCCIO, LEONE, FAVILLA, PETRONILLA
and GAJETTA.*

FAVILLA.

So he's away. Good, — he will find us here
when he comes back.

PETRONILLA.

What if she should come first?

FAVILLA.

She? Who?

PETRONILLA.

The unknown lady for whose sake
last night he gave us all the slip. Cecchino
told me but now.

FAVILLA.

Let me but meet her here!

COSINO slips out.

LEONE.

That would be merry seeing.

GAIETTA.

Where's the boy?

BEPPUCCIO.

Gone for the victual, doubtless. For my part
I know where Benvenuto keeps his wine.
Here, will you drink from such a cup as never
your lips have touched till now?

FAVILLA, *taking it.*

It is not finished.

LEONE.

So much the rarer.

PETRONILLA.

He is wonderful, —
never was such a goldsmith.

They examine the pieces of work about the room.

GAIETTA.

See this casket;

is it not exquisite? So fair a shell
must hold a precious kernel.

PETRONILLA.

What is in it?

GAIETTA, *rattling it.*

I wonder.

FAVILLA.

Why, the key is in the lock.

PETRONILLA.

But who dares open it?

FAVILLA.

Who speaks of daring?

Give it to me. It is a necklace — see.

GAIETTA.

Oh, beautiful! What curious design.

PETRONILLA.

There is a name woven among the flowers.

FAVILLA.

A name —

*She studies it for a moment, then looks up with
an angry face.*

Cunningly wrought — too cunningly
for me to read. —

PETRONILLA.

Let me see.

A knock at the half-open door.

LEONE.

Who is there?

A heavily-veiled lady opens the door and shrinks back affrighted at sight of the company.

BEPPUCCIO.

The lady!

FAVILLA.

Of the necklace, by the saints!

THE LADY.

I seek Signor Cellini, — is he here?

LEONE.

He'll be here presently. Will you come in?

THE LADY.

I had not thought —

FAVILLA,

seizing her hand and drawing her into the room.

I say you shall come in.

You had not thought to find so many here.

You thought to keep your tryst even as last night,
is it not so?

THE LADY.

Madonna!

FAVILLA.

Innocence!

CECCHINO, *outside.*

Ho, all! — *entering.*

How now, who's this?

FAVILLA.

Our new recruit, —
your gallant brother's latest lady-love.

CECCHINO.

What, fairly trapped! Has he not yet come home?

He puts down fruit, etc., on the table.

Madonna, you are welcome. Till he comes
I am your host.

THE LADY.

Let me be gone.

FAVILLA.

Not yet.

We two shall greet him, you and I, together.

Put up your veil and let us see your face.

THE LADY.

No, no!

FAVILLA.

Must it be kept for him alone?

I say that I will see what thing it is
for which he leaves me.

LEONE.

He will do you harm —

Let her alone. You know his anger.

FAVILLA.

Ay, —

I have a pretty anger of my own

to match with his. Off with your veil, Madonna,
and solve this pretty puzzle that I hold.

THE LADY, *starting at sight of the necklace.*

Where did you get that?

FAVILLA.

Why, I snatched it — so!

*She tears off the veil, disclosing a pretty,
frightened face, closely wrapped in a head-
kerchief.*

Bah, 't is a child! a foolish little toy
to dandle on one's knee.

PETRONILLA.

Undoubtedly

so Benvenuto thinks.

FAVILLA.

You sharp-clawed cat, —

I'd not be jealous of a babe unweaned —
and yet, — if that rare jewel was for her —
Hark you, what is your name?

THE LADY.

My name?

FAVILLA.

How now,
am I a mincing whisperer like yourself?
Who knows her name?

CECCHINO.

I seem to know her face.

LEONE.

She has a look of someone I have seen.

THE LADY.

Kind sirs, I pray you, stare not on me so.

Pity me, — let me go. — I'll tell you all,

and never hear another word of love

from Messer Benvenuto, if you will.

I am Cosino's sister.

CECCHINO.

By the mass,

but you are like him!

LEONE.

Yes, I see it now.

FAVILLA.

Speak, was this made for you?

THE LADY.

'T was not for you,

at all events.

BEPPUCCIO.

Brava! so there's a tongue

behind those pretty lips.

THE LADY, *simpering*.

Oh, sir, — you shame me!

BEPPUCCIO.

What, with a word? Your bashfulness becomes you.

Say, will a kiss buy me a blush as well?

THE LADY.

Let be! No man has ever kissed me.

CECCHINO.

What?

Not Benvenuto?

FAVILLA.

Out upon you, minx,
with your mock daintiness. I will be sworn
you are no more a bashful maid than I.

THE LADY, *hiding her face.*

Too true, alas!

BEPPUCCIO.

There, you have made her weep.
See how her sobs shake all her slender body.
Nay, little one, I'll comfort thee. What's this?
That was a laugh and not a sob, I swear.

*As he strives to draw her hands from her face,
the kerchief falls off, disclosing COSINO'S closely
cropped head, flushed with laughter.*

You little mocking devil!

COSINO.

Ah, Favilla!

You are no more a bashful maid than I!

Wouldst kiss me now, Messer Beppuccio?

CECCHINO.

You have befooled us rarely.

FAVILLA.

Little pest, —

but where's your master?

COSINO.

Somewhere else, it seems.

Not here.

FAVILLA.

So that was why your trick was played.

To hold us here, while he kept merry tryst
with last night's lady!

CECCHINO.

Let us seek him out.

GAIETTA.

Where could you look? He has given us the slip.—
Well, let him go to-night. Here is good cheer.—
Let us be merry by ourselves.

COSINO.

And I

will be his proxy with Favilla here.

FAVILLA.

Off with you, gnat. Could we but read this name
I know that we could trace him. 'T is no use
to ask you, little prince of lies. Alas,
't is wrought too cunningly. I cannot rest
until I find it out.

PETRONILLA.

Why, what falls here
upon the gold? A tear?

FAVILLA.

Ay, of vexation.

Look closer here. Can no one read it?

*As she speaks, BENVENUTO enters, and stands
looking at the company. With the last question,
he takes the necklace from her.*

BENVENUTO.

No.

He flings it into the brazier of coals.

CECCHINO.

Why, brother, what's amiss? Your face is gray.
Truly, you look but ill. Is't well with you?

BENVENUTO, *with an effort.*

It is most well.

FAVILLA.

Where have you been?

BENVENUTO.

At work.

Now I am weary, — here you have good cheer.

We will be merry.

CECCHINO.

Spoken like my brother.

To-night you shall not leave us in the lurch.

BENVENUTO.

No, nothing calls me from the revelry
to-night, nor shall again. No more to me
shall come that vision of celestial things
that lift the soul and break the heart.

PETRONILLA.

How strange

you are to-night.

BENVENUTO.

Mirth and short love for me!

Favilla —

FAVILLA, *sullenly*.

Tell me, whose the name that twined
among the blossoms in that necklace?

BENVENUTO.

Nay,

it is forgotten, — fused in searing fire
into a molten blank. So — let it go.
Henceforth, I see no women in the world
but you and such as you. Come, let us drink.

LEONE.

Ay, you 're still pale. See, how your hand is shaking.
It must have been work of the mightiest
that you have done, to be so strangely spent.

BENVENUTO.

The greatest work that I have ever done.
The noblest work that I shall ever do.

Across the way DOMIZIO and LUCIANA enter the room with a lamp. As they pass the window, she clinging to him, he stoops and kisses her.

LEONE.

Where is it?

GAIETTA.

Let us see it!

PETRONILLA.

Is it done?




BENVENUTO.

Yes, it is done, — but not for you to see.

With a reckless laugh, he flings the shutters of his window together, and stands facing the rest, who stare at him, bewildered.

- CURTAIN. -



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